DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 727 TM 017 919

AUTHOR House, Ernest R.; And Others
TITLE Definition of Content in Social Studies Testing: Conceptual Content Assessment Report.
INSTITUTION Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Los Angeles, CA.; Colorado Univ., Boulder.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO CSE-R-273
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 93p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; Educational Assessment; Higher Education; High Schools; History; Interviews; Political Science; Professors; Secondary School Teachers; *Social Studies; *Standardized Tests; Student Evaluation; *Teacher Attitudes; Test Construction; *Test Content; Test Format; Testing Problems; Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Experts

ABSTRACT

Three political scientists, three historians, three social studies professors (higher education), and seven secondary school teachers of social studies or history were interviewed. Focus was on assessing key concepts in the subjects' disciplines and what concepts should be taught and tested for at the high school level, with a view toward determining how content on standardized social studies tests should be defined and what that content should be. There was considerable consensus among the political scientists as to what the key concepts were, particularly about American government, but there was not much consensus among historians. There was also considerable consensus among social studies educators, who emphasized thinking skills and citizenship over content; and there was some consensus among high school teachers, who emphasized citizenship even more, but differed on key content. All subjects agreed that the teaching of facts was not a proper goal in and of itself. There was general agreement that standardized tests are not the proper way to assess student learning, and both the content of tests and the multiple-choice format were strongly criticized. Essay tests were the universal choice. High school texts were usually disdained and their publishers criticized. Neither discipline consensus on subject matter nor textbooks are good candidates for sources of test content based on this study, although some areas of consensus exist. Later phases of the study will explore other approaches to content definition. The three interview protocols are included. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341227

C·R·E·S·S·T

Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. C. BEER

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

DEFINITION OF CONTENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES TESTING: CONCEPTUAL CONTENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Ernest R. House
Carol Emmer
Elain Kolitch
Barbara Waitz
and
Eva L. Baker

CSE Report No. 273

TM017919

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DEFINITION OF CONTENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES TESTING: CONCEPTUAL CONTENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Ernest R. House
Carol Emmer
Elain Kolitch
Barbara Waitz
and
Eva L. Baker

CSE Report No. 273

Center for the Study of Evaluation
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Los Angeles

1987

The project presented, or reported herein, was performed pursuant to a Grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement/Department of Education (OERI/ED). However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OERI/ED and no official endorsement by the OERI/ED should be inferred.

DEFINITION OF CONTENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES TESTING
Conceptual Content Assessment Report--Phase 1,December 1987

Ernest R. House
with Carol Emmer, Elaine Kolitch, Barbara Waitz,
and Beverly Bushey
University of Colorado at Boulder

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A small number of poltical scientists, historians, social studies educators, and high school social studies teachers were interviewed about what the key concepts were in their disciplines and what concepts should be taught and tested for at the high school level, with a view to determing ultimately how content on standardized social studies tests should be defined and what that content should be.

There was considerable consensus among the political scientists as to what the key concepts were, particularly with regard to American government, not much among the historians, considerable among the social studies educators, who stressed thinking skills and citizenship over content, and some among the teachers, who emphasized citizenship even more but differed on key content. All agreed that the teaching of facts was not a proper goal in and of itself although some lamented the lack of knowledge of their students.

There was univeral agreement among all parties that standardized tests were not the proper way to assess student learning, with both the content of the tests and the multiple choice format strongly assailed. Essay tests were the universal choice. High school texts were universally disdained as being dull, distorted, and under control of publishers whose main goal was sales.

Neither discipline consensus on subject matter nor textbooks are good candidates for the sources of test content based on these results, although there are certain areas of consensus on content. We will explore other approaches and rationales for content definition in later phases of this study.

THE STUDY

The ultimate purpose of the conceptual content assessment project is to investigate what content should be tested for on national standardized tests and how that content should be defined. The content on these tests seems to be taken for granted, or at least considered as essentially no problem, by many members of the testing community, who see the important testing problems as shaping the correct specific test items according to proper test statistics. However, it is clear that a test could have good items according to professional standards of test development and yet not contain the content one might want.

Recent concerns about the content of what American students know and should know have been raised by critics such as E.D.Hirsch in his book Cultural Literacy (1987) and Ravitch and Finn (1987) in What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? Hirsch claims that there is a common core of knowledge that all Americans should know in order to be "culturally literate," while Ravitch and Finn contend that American high school students are abysmally ignorant of basic knowledge in both history and literature. These and similar criticisms raise questions about what we should be teaching and testing for. This project is a rather modest inquiry into such matters, more of a small intellectual foray rather than a grand assault. There are five phases.

The first phase of the project is to select a specific content area, in this case social studies, one of the subject areas most closely aligned with the cultural literacy notion, and to determine on a small

scale what the key concepts are in that area according to political scientists, historians, social studies educators, and teachers. To that end we interviewed 3 historians, 3 political scientists, 3 social studies educators, and 7 high school social studies teachers as to what they think the key concepts are in their respective areas and what they think should be taught in the public high schools. Are there are important differences as to what disciplinarians, social studies educators, and teachers think are important concepts? What are the "key concepts" of the disciplines as conceived by these various groups? The result of this first phase is reported here.

The second phase is to relate these findings to the concept of "cultural literacy," i.e. should we be teaching a common cultural core of ideas, and, if so, what should those ideas consist of and who should define them? This second phase requires becoming familiar with the literature on cultural literacy, as well as with the most relevant research projects in the R and D centers, such as Wisconsin and Pittsburgh. In the first phase we identify key concepts in the social sciences and in the second phase we will examine how well the content on the relevant tests matches both the key concepts, if there is any agreement, and the content recommended by the cultural literacy advocates.

The third phase of the project is to address the question of what the content definition process is in the testing of the social sciences generally. We will investigate exactly how content is defined in the social science testing area by interviewing the developers of prominent social studies tests. Is there a common

process for defining content for assessement and how good is it? What kind of content does this process produce?

In the final phase we will combine all the material we have on definition of content in standardized tests, the results of the other work in the Center along similar lines, the work of the other R and D centers, and make recommendations about what the proper processes for defining the content of tests should be and possibly what some of the content itself should be. In this report we report on the first phase of the project, which is the investigation of key concepts in the social studies content area.

THE PROBLEM

Social science and natural science have been identified as the two areas of highest priority for future testing by samples of district-level administrators both nationally and in California. Greatly increased testing is expected in both these areas at the secondary level in the next few years. One of the primary problems identified by these administrators is the lack of an adequate analysis of the core skills and content within these content areas (Aschbacher, 1986).

As part of a larger exploration of content area assessment, we investigated what key concepts and ideas in the social sciences should be tested for at the secondary level. Our approach here is primarily conceptual, that is, an analysis of the perspectives of those central to defining what the social sciences and social studies are. In our original definition of the problem, we assumed that there should

be congruity between the critical concepts in the social sciences on the one hand and the objectives and content of secondary school tests on the other, and this line of thought was developed in the original proposal. However, on reflecting about the matter more thoroughly, three additional questions arose: Is there substantial agreement among social scientists regarding the critical concepts in their disciplines? Should these key concepts, if identified, be taught to secondary students? If taught, should they be tested for?

To put the matter another way, we had assumed that the secondary school curriculum was derived or should be derived from the social sciences themselves. Certainly that is how we think of the natural sciences and mathematics. Content in the natural sciences and mathematics at the secondary level should reflect the content in those disciplines themselves, most experts believe, and one would be appalled if bad science or bad math were taught or tested for.

Of course, there are disagreements in all these disciplines about exactly <u>which</u> concepts should be taught at lower levels as well as <u>how</u> they should be taught. For example, the major criticisms of math tests by many mathematicians is that the tests focus too much on drill and practice and do not capture either the knowledge or application of essential concepts. In an attempt to improve on conceptually impoverished secondary math instruction, curriculum reformers have endeavored to introduce new math content and to limit drill and practice. The federally-supported Compreshensive School Mathematics Project (CSMP) was a good example of a project which in fact created its own tests of content to evaluate the new knowledge its students were expected to learn, and those tests

differed substantially in content from what was commercially available.

On reflection, however, the relationship between the disciplines and the secondary curriculum is not so obvious in the social studies as we at first supposed, and perhaps is not entirely resolved even in the natural sciences, as dramatized by the resurgence of a creationist approach to biological evolution. In the social studies in particular one might imagine that quite different ideas might legitimately be taught at the secondary level other than the key concepts of the social sciences. The secondary school is the place where the civic virtues, democratic ideology, and ideals of citizenship are emphasized in the curriculum. These notions are not necessarily identical to the main ideas in the social sciences.

For example, the pluralist-elitist theory of democracy currently dominant in political science portrays democracy as a process of bargaining among only the leaders of the major power groups, an idea significantly different from popular conceptions about how democracy works. The pluralist-elitist theory of democracy states that since decisions are made by leaders bargaining among themselves for the various groups they represent, it is not desirable for the masses in those organizations to be politically active most of the time. In fact, strong activity by the membership of these organizations would actually make the operations of these governing elites more difficult. Do we teach secondary school students to be politically inactive? Obviously not. This notion conflicts strongly with American values concerning the active citizen. It is not a

foregone conclusion that this theory should be taught in the public schools.

Hence, the question of test content leads to a broader investigation of the social studies curriculum itself. What should be tested for is not a matter that can be resolved empirically, although it can be empirically informed. Rather the issue is partly a philosophic queston, and we will try to address it that way. What this means for our study is that we will initially focus on the fit between the social science disciplines and what should be tested but we will not assume that the fit between the two is unproblematic.

Such reasoning requires a broadening of the study to examine what is currently being taught and tested for in the social studies areas. With this information we can look at the relationship between what <u>is</u> and what <u>should</u> be taught and the degree to which the tests should reflect this content. So in this study we broadened our investigation to include not only the conceptions of what the social scientists see as critical and necessary but also what social studies teachers and administrators and social science educators see as critical.

We first investigated the conceptual structure of social science disciplinarians to ascertain what they thought the key ideas to be in their discipline and what they thought should be taught and tested for in the secondary school curriculum. Similarly we investigated the perspectives of social science educators, key mediators between the social science disciplines and the secondary school curriculum, to ascertain their views on the topic, and we also interviewed social studies teachers in the secondary schools to see what they are

teaching and testing for and what they thought the curriculum should be and what tests should consist of.

We interviewed disciplinarians in two social sciences--history, focusing primarily on American history, and political science, again focusing on the American governmental system. Since this was an exploratory study with very limited resources, we limited our interview sample to persons and places where it was convenient to conduct interviews, mostly in Colorado. We interviewed 3. historians, 3 political scientists, 3 social studies educators, and 7 secondary school teachers. We selected the historians and political scientists primarily from nominations from the Social Science Education Consortium. These were not average professionals but rather those who had distinguished themselves by reputation. Interview schedules are included in the Appendices.

Two major questions were addressed in the interviews. First, what are the key concepts that structure that particular discipline? Second, should these concepts be taught and tested for at the secondary school level? What in addition to or instead of the key concepts should be taught and tested for, in the opinion of the social scientists? We tape recorded these interviews and summarized them, identifying the key concepts put forth by the disciplinarians.

A second level of analysis compared the interviews of the three disciplinary specialists to see how much agreement there was among them as to what the key concepts are and what should be taught and tested for. Following a within-discipline analysis of each of the two disciplines, we conducted an across-discipline analysis to see how

congruent the key concepts and ideas were between history and politicial science.

Why choose these two disciplines? For example, we have left out economics, psychology, sociology, linguistics, and geography. Our reason is that history and political science are the disciplines most likely to inform teaching at the secondary level in the social studies. The typical high school curriculum, at least in this locality, currently consists of Civics in the 9th grade, World History in the 10th grade, American History in the 11th grade, and an elective choice in the 12th grade usually consisting of economics, psychology, sociology, law, or global education. The first three years are often mandated by local or state edict.

In thinking about these issues, particularly the gap between the disciplines and the secondary classroom, we decided that it was also highly desirable to interview social studies educators. These professionals act as something of mediators between the teachers and the disciplines. Perhaps this is where teachers get their ideas of what is appropriate to teach rather than from the disciplines directly. Are the ideas of the social science educators significantly different from those of the disciplinarians? We included three social studies educators in our interviews, esesentially exploring the same ground with them as with the disciplinarians. Again the focus was on what should be taught and tested for in social studies at the secondary level. We analyzed their responses the same way as those of the disciplinarians, comparing and contrasting their responses to one another for consistency and agreement, and also to the responses of the social scientists.

Having included the curriculum as a major item of concern, it was important that we ascertain the views of some social studies teachers. We interviewed seven social studies teachers on the issue of what should be taught and tested for, and compared their responses to those of the social scientists and to those of the social science educators to see how they differed.

FINDINGS

Political Scientists

The three political scientists interviewed were all accomplished in that they had written several books and articles. They were asked to identify the key concepts in their discipline and to discuss what was appropriate to teach at the high school level. The interviews ended with their thoughts about evaluation and testing procedures.

Democracy was a key concept cited by all three political scientists, democracy being a broad concept which encompassed separation of powers, an independent judiciary, and federalism, and which included more specific concepts such as accountability, self-interest, representation, and conflict of interest. One scholar cited the historic debate among the founding fathers as to the efficacy of implementing democracy, and another enlarged upon the idea of representation to include the process of deliberation.

The concept of politics was cited ty two of the scholars, one seeing politics as including notions of privilege and the distributive process, and which involved the myths of equality and God-given rights, and the other seeing the political system as a network of relationships among men. Another stressed the independence of the parts of the system. Other concepts mentioned included constitutionalism, government, and power. One scholar saw government as a discipline separate from political science itself. All these answers reflected a general consensus among the political scientists.

Indeed, the political scientists themselves cited consensus among political science scholars regarding certain abstract concepts like democratic theory. However, they felt that there were differences regarding epistemological approaches and more specific concepts. Two cited a long-standing dispute between empirical and normative interpretations. The concepts of power and democracy were not considered valid by some experts in the field because they could not be operationalized. The effectiveness of certain institutions was debated. Is the electoral system obsolete? How do we handle the free-rider problem in society? Does the separation of powers promote deadlock? In short, the political scientists did not agree among themselves as to whether a consensus existed in the field regarding key concepts. What appears to be the case is that consensus exists on some key concepts but other ideas are hotly disputed.

All three political scientists felt that the key concepts could be taught at the high school level but they differed upon approach. All three stressed using original historical material and readings as important avenues for learning. One felt that high school courses should be more analytic in nature, and that students should be exposed to evidence and taught the difference between arguing from example vs. arguing from evidence. Another felt that all these concepts should be made relevant to the students' lives and advised direct participation in student government and politics. The third seemed to prefer a more traditional approach where students read, analyze, and write about what they have learned. All three stressed

the need to promote conceptual skills and to work more on the basic skills of reading critically and writing coherently.

The political scientists also expressed strong opinions about testing. All three were strongly opposed to multiple choice tests, yet all felt forced to use them in some form or another due to large classes and limited time. The ideal university exam, one said, would be an essay exam 2 1/2 hours long with 10-15 questions. Another said that evaluation was going in the wrong direction in order to satisfy state legislators by using standardized, multiple choice tests which deemphasized holistic knowledge. The third had reviewed the new AP history exam and said that it was good but essentially fact oriented. All three strongly agreed that facts should not be the primary focus of teaching, that facts should fit into a larger framework. Testing for facts was testing at the lowest level. There was more agreement about this than about the basic concepts in their field.

The table below summarizes the most general concepts mentioned by the political scientists, and the following section summarizes each individual view and elaborates these concepts in the words of the political scientists themselves.

Political Scientists	Concepts
McBride	Privilege and its distribution
	Myths, such as equality and rights
	Constitutionalism
	Democracy
	Separation of powers
Stone	Democratic theory, including accountability, self-interest, public interest, conflict of interest, representation, rights
	Individual vs. collective action
Dodd	Representation
	Government
	Power
	Political system

Conrad McBride will be retiring this fall after forty years of teaching and research. He says he is thankful he is retiring and feels the concept of teaching has reached "the end of the line" as students are asked to study in excessive numbers in auditorium-size classrooms. He offers other such colorful insights into his forty years experience.

McBride began by dividing political science and U.S. government into two different disciplines. For the purpose of this study, we decided to concentrate on U.S. government. Within the discipline of the U.S. government, the concept of politics is a term which is "sloppily used by most of us." Those who study it tend to define politics on an abstract level as "who gets what, when, why," or

as an "authoritative distribution of values," or "in the operational sense as the art of the possible."

The concept of privilege and its distribution is even more important.

> It is important in the study of government for any given society to look at its set of rules and decide how privilege is distributed; what the underlying values of society are which might tend to define the process for distribution of privilege.

Students need to be exposed to a set of myths embedded in the distributive process. One such element is the concept of equality found in the Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal. "So that the concept of equality under the law becomes one of the guiding principles by which privilege is distributed in American politics."

Another guiding principle is that each individual in our system has a constitutionally protected set of rights. McBride feels that it is important in any course not only to discuss the enumerated rights in the Bill of Rights, but also to explore what the concept means.

> How does one acquire rights? What are they? Are they attached only to individuals or to governments as well? How do governments acquire rights? It is important to establish in students' minds some inquiry as to where rights come from and how we discovered the human phenomenon called rights. The Declaration of Independence declares that rights are ordained by a great creator. This points to a myth structure of powerful ideas that society has accepted in its political operations. It is inconceivable in the U.S. that universal God-created rights could be ignored. The whole system proceeds from that idea.

Another fundamental concept is constitutionalism. Dr. McBride's definition of constitutionalism is based on Jefferson's words in the Declaration of Independence: "Government's created among men for their safety and happiness." The Constitution is a guiding set of rules, born of communal consent, which is considered legitimate by society.

> More important than the paper itself is the degree to which society pays respect to the Constitution and lends support to the principles on which it's founded. Most people don't know what's in it, but it is sacred and legitimizes government. It is a point of reference for what can or can't be done.

Students must realize how much they participate in the Constitution on a daily basis.

> It is this promise that drove Martin Luther King to fulfill his dream. We're not there yet, but it still sets goals and tells us what we ought to be doing.

The concept of democracy and the early debate over its efficacy in a new country spread over a great distance by the founding fathers is important for students to consider.

> Too much has been said about the founders being democratic in their philosophical reasoning and not enough about the practical wisdom of instrumental problems implementing democracy. The founders were neither starry eyed dreamers nor democratic elitists, so that raising the questions whether or not it (democracy) is a principle that can be applied in practical terms so as to allow a democratically dedicated government to work is valid. Thus, a government can operate with a commitment to achieve democratic ideals even though it might not be operationally democratic; a government chosen the same way can likewise operate with undemocratic ideas.

There is a lack of consensus among political scientists about the intent and consequences of the concept of separation of powers. Some experts point to Federalist Paper #51 and assert that the original goal behind a separation of powers was not to establish an efficient government, but to defeat a tendency towards tyranny. Other argue that the founding fathers didn't mean to separate powers.

> Some say we have too much deadlock. We have a Congress which sits astride the government policy process, daring the President to say something and threatening to veto. The founders wanted a government without tyranny but got a stalemate.
>
> Others assert that the separation of powers has broken down in another way in that the Electoral College ceased to function in the 1960's. This subtle systemic change has led to a presidency-focused government and the original design is not there, but is tilted towards the President who dares Congress towards impeachment. Those same critics argue that the impeachment process has become useless.

McBride feels that the above concepts can be discussed at both the university and high school levels and differ only at "the depth which you have to engage in. Appropriateness is determined at that point when kids exhibit some interest in them."

When asked how he introduced these concepts, he replied:

> We (professors) never learned anything about teaching. We're learned-by-mistakes folks. I teach by talking through the context and I show some films. Most importantly, I have students read. Reading is the most efficient means of learning.

He expressed strong opinions about test format. In his own classes McBride uses a combination of multiple choice and essay exams.

> My students write an essay focused on foundation ideas. People who know something well can write a sensible essay. I think of it as a discussion in writing.
>
> The use of multiple choice questions is necessary due to large class loads and limited time. They are an abomination and don't satisfy my sense of what I'm doing. I've never given a decent multiple choice exam, but I don't feel I have much choice. Preparing analytical multiple choice questions is extremely time-consuming and the payoff for instructors is not nearly great enough.
>
> The ideal university level exam would last for 2 1/2 hours and consist of 10-15 questions that deal with concepts. They would be analytical questions of a general nature which would provoke students to tell me what they know.

When asked about the possible benefits of implementing standardized exams, he replied, "Fire all the faculty. There's no need for any faculty in that. Perhaps individual instruction on T.V. is the way to go with class sizes as large as they are."

McBride's comments ended on a note of sadness and relief. He spoke of a gradual decline in his students' abilities to read critically and write coherently.

> If anything, the high schools have gotten worse, at least in the instruction of the social sciences. I have not seen one area of improvement. I am happy I am retiring for we've reached the end of the line in university instruction with all these large lectures in large auditoriums.

Larry Dodd is a recent addition to the Political Science Department at the University of Colorado. He teaches at the Center for American Studies. In his opinion, there are several key concepts in the discipline of political science, the starting point of which is the concept of democracy. "We must begin by asking what the nature of democracy is. It's sort of complex."

Representation was the next concept:

> It has a subtle element to it. It's not simply doing what the people want. It has some aspect of deliberation where the representatives have information and the chance to talk with one another and the way they come to understand problems. The people who elect them may not accept the way they deal with those problems. It's a very subtle idea. Because of computers and the mass media, kids think we can have an electronic democracy--everybody voting everything. Deliberation allows us a way to represent the people.

Government was the third concept cited.

> It's a subtle concept. It's the ability of the system, the elite, to make the decisions to be responsible for making the policies, not just separately, but rather in the way a nation-state operates. So you can do things individually that are very good, but collectively can have a negative influence, if you make them without considering what's good for the total system, as well as the press. You can have party, non-party support which may be detrimental to the nation-state as a whole.

A fourth concept is power, which is often debated.

> There's going to be a chance for some groups to have greater impact, leverage, authority than others. Since there is inequity in personal influence and power in the social structure, i. impacts politics and the nature of democracy in government. My daughter is learning that now in the eighth grade reading Animal Farm and is dealing well with it.

A final concept is political system:

> Politics is more than just Congress, the President or the Supreme Court. It's a network of relationships among men. Sounds very clicheish, but textbooks can actually point out there is great interdependence among parts of the political system and ignore certain parts of the system. This can lead to incorrect conclusions. I see a lot of that in mainstream political science. Some ignore the idea of cooperation. They look exclusively at causation. A political system of interdependent parts is very valuable. It's not only in government; it's groups out in society.

Dodd believes that political science is perhaps the most conflictual of the social sciences. This lack of consensus can be found when discussing the ideas of power and democracy.

> There's a debate now over whether you can even use the word power. Some say you can't operationalize it and measure it precisely. The word democracy is also conflictual for the same reasons. The conflict over these concepts can be exciting to get across. The students need to know that their concepts and what the disagreements over them are and that they play a role in deciding how they're going to use the concepts. My daughter is doing this now with Animal Farm. It's important for students to play intellectually and not to have consensus imposed on them.

There is a similar lack of consensus regarding what should be taught in political science courses at the university level. Traditionally, there has been a normative versus empirical split in the teaching of political science, but currently there is an interplay between the two. At both the high school and university levels, the concepts taught should be made relevant to the students' lives. One example at the high school level would be participation in student government.

> The students need to know what concepts mean in personal ways and it's hard to do. I personally go light on facts and try to relate them to the real world. That's what they're going to remember at the college level. Most of the facts are going to be lost.

In his own classes, Dodd likes to relate concepts to stories and use historical documents to make ideas personal.

> I try to draw pictures in the air. Of course, I'm from west Texas and we're great story tellers. Students do need to know some structural mechanisms such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances. Once again, the most exciting way to do this is somehow introduce them in terms of the role they play in stories. For example, I go back to the Federalist Papers, the reason and logic that led to these structural mechanisms. I talk about Madison and other people.

He does not like hyperfactual texts and envisions a different format:

> I envision a 12-15 chapter textbook created around concepts, relationships in which each chapter, perhaps like psychotherapy texts, is related to relationships and systems. The power in the system, democracy in the family, can also be found in a government textbook in a way a kid could relate to and remember. Students who come into our freshmen classes have no coherent conceptions, no conceptual foundations. That's far more important than factual information.

He prefers to evaluate his students by having them write a story rather than a multiple choice test. Discussion of events is also important. He does not agree with the current trend in evaluation:

> Basically, evaluation is going the wrong direction. I think we all know that. We are going through evaluation to satisfy the state legislature that something's being accomplished. The same thing is happening at the college level. More and more control is being taken from the front line. We increasingly

> know from our students that there is no relationship between evaluation (ACT, SAT, GRE) and performance. Evaluation is taking us away from holistic knowledge. That's my bias. In my large classes, my students write at least one or two essays, in addition to answering multiple choice items based on conceptual and logical elements. I think it's horrid to create your evaluation techniques around multiple choice; you miss the point.

Dodd also feels that students need to develop social, interpersonal skills and be able to explore avenues of personal interest. He cites Barbara Jordan as an example of a "drive, drive, drive" type person who developed emotional problems when only concentrating on academics. In general, he seems to be concerned about helping his students develop the ability to see relationships, use logic and draw conclusions, while studying the key concepts. Facts are a minute part of the learning process.

Walter Stone, also a political science professor at the Center for American Studies, stated that the key concepts in political science relate to a broad concept he calls Democratic Theory.

> One of the best ways to start unraveling this concept is to take a look at concepts related to Democratic Theory: accountability, self-interest, public interest, representation and conflict of interest.
>
> One must also look at concepts related to specific institutions, which in some ways operationalize Democratic Theory. For example, the concepts which relate to the legislature. The legislature is typically ineffective and is generally the central institution in most contemporary Western democracies.
>
> There are trade-offs in Democratic Theory between concepts like effectiveness and efficiency vs. responsiveness and representation

Stone also identified another important concept relating to the idea of rights.

> There's a whole series coming out of different traditions having to do with rights. The Bill of Rights, the question of majority vs. minority rights.

At the abstract level, most political scientists would agree on the definition of Democratic Theory. There is less consensus about specific concepts, depending upon the particular epistomology espoused by the scholar in question. For example, some political scientists ascribe to the theory of rational choice. Although Stone believes that some tenents of this theory could be made accessible to beginnning students, he admits,

> There would be real disagreement among political scientists as to how appropriate teaching rational choice theory would be. Because the theory is abstract and related to a specific epistemology in microeconomics, it is often criticized as not conforming to the real world.

An illustrative example of this lack of consensus follows:

> One might ask why the citizen is so uninformed about the political world. One explanation is that citizens are free riders. The citizen is interacting with a process he can't affect and so opts out. So you have concepts like rational ignorance, abstention or nonparticipation that are normatively troubling to some (that it's rational to do).

Another disagreement among scholars centers on the functions of government courses (curriculum), particularly at the high school level.

> Whether or not to socialize people into certain values or concentrate on analytical functions is a choice educators must face: much of what goes on in primary and secondary education is designed not to promote analysis, but to socialize people.

Stone leans towards an analytic bias and feels strongly that, "The function in an introductory course is <u>not</u> to acquaint students with a list of facts, but to give a framework or frameworks with which to analyze facts." He chooses to introduce concepts which push his students to link up to a broader theory and which are related to evidence one might need to answer questions like, "Are our representatives accountable?" In addition to key concepts, Stone believes that high school students can not only be challenged more, but should also be taught how to examine evidence.

> What's the difference between arguing from evidence vs. example? Our discipline as a whole does a very bad job teaching this. There is almost no attempt made to show students what empirical, descriptive data would look like to support your ideas. The freshmen students I get haven't learned to separate ideological, symbolic statements about politics from empirical matters.

He believes this discrepancy in part is due to a lack of consensus concerning what the social sciences are all about. He tends not to agree with the interpretation that many high school teachers offer and feels they have been trained to do a better job.

> My kids are now in junior and senior high school, and their classes are disappointing to me because they more often are trying to encourage kids to read the newspaper. I don't believe that's social science; that's something else. You can get

> evidence from the newspaper. Keeping informed from descriptive sources is not what social scientists do....If you compare the degree of abstraction and level of analysis in math and science to that in the social sciences, there is a big difference. Some government teachers feel they should get their kids active in a campaign. But if the course is supposed to bear some relationship to political science, that's not what it is. The high school teachers have been through some political science courses but that's not what they do.

The discrepancies in interpretation of what social science and political science are about seem to be symptomatic of an underlying "lack of self-confidence in both fields."

> There is much more to both disciplines than others think there is. Are we confident that we can speak to the outside world with the same amount of confidence as a physicist? No. We would be much more reticent to say we know something of value than they would. We have less funding for our research. There is more consensus on what the questions are in other social sciences. They've done a better job selling themselves to the public. I'm not sure we're scientists, at least as defined by a biologist.

Stone has his own ideas about what the basis of an American government course could/should be:

> I'd start the course with the single most intelligent (not necessarily correct) coherent justification for doing it this way-- in Federalist Paper #10 by James Madison. What's he assuming about human nature, political behavior? How much of the good life is a political problem, how much not a political problem? What's he saying about majority rule and minority rights, etc.? Then you could engage these at the value level. Are these the kinds of assumptions you're prepared to accept? This can be done at the factual level as well. Is this an accurate description? There's a hidden value that's never mentioned, and here it's being celebrated--individualism. The student who reads it won't see it. It's celebrated in our Constitution. What are you getting and giving up when you celebrate it?

Stone was asked by ETS to review the new AP history exam and test it on his incoming students. He felt that the exam was good, but essentially fact oriented. Facts, whether introduced in a textbook, by the instructor, or on a test, need to fit into a larger framework.

> The selection of facts should be motivated by some larger question. How does the author/teacher decide which facts to convey to the students? There's a question lurking in the background which motivated the author/teacher to select from a whole array of facts. Why ignore other facts? Both teachers and students should be engaged at that level.

He feels that the whole purpose of testing is to,

> Ask the student to show some ability to think critically and analytically about collective life. The ability to organize oneself in a way that reflects whatever value gives it meaning. That's what political science is ultimately dealing with. Testing moves to the lowest common denominator when testing only an inventory of facts.

He uses an essay testing format for the most part, but because of foreign students and the grading burden, he also includes multiple choice questions which require students to enter into the reasoning process.

> If you had a multiple choice exam, for example, on long division, you can ask the student to do long division or ask him to enter into the reasoning process. You can do the same in political science.

Perhaps Stone's thoughts about teaching and testing can be summarized by the following:

> I don't think, repeat, don't think an inventory of facts is an appropriate starting point. If you tell me a student doesn't

know what judicial review is--is that the same as a student not knowing Chaucer? Does that mean they're illiterate? I would much rather they be able to read, understand, and analyze it.

Historians

There is little consensus about the key concepts in history among the three historians interviewed. In fact, there is little agreement about what an historical concept actually is. One historian thought that historical concepts are themes or broad stories that tie together disparate happenings. All were in agreement that history had little to do with social sciences such as sociology, although economic and business factors were cited by one as a key history concept. Stories, anecdotes, narratives were seen as central organizing structures.

All thought that students should know certain facts and events, yet that facts were not enough. It was how facts were put together that counted. If one were to draw Venn diagrams of the key concepts of history mentioned by these three historians, all of whom had written books, there would be some overlap but essentially elongated diagrams extending in several different directions and possibly into three dimensions. The historians organize their subject matter into themes and stories but each uses different themes and stories. The subject matter themes cited by the historians were also more particularistic and more imbued with morality and values than were those of the political scientists. In spite of facts and events as central concerns, the historians saw their discipline as conveying strong normative lessons, although not necessarily agreeing on what those lessons were.

As with the political scientists the historians had great disdain for standardized tests, which they thought measured skills that had little to do with historic understanding. Reasoning, making an argument, doing research, putting ideas together, drawing conclusions from evidence were what was intellectually important. Even the Advanced Placement Tests were "wrongheaded and test nothing." One confessed to hypocrisy in disliking standardized tests yet wanting her students to have a "general fund" of information.

Historians	Concepts
Anderson	Land vs. labor
	Impact of war
	Intercultural contact
	Unification
	Importance and autonomy of key ideas
Limerick	Pluralism and diversity
	Political and governmental influences
	Environmental history
	Private sphere history
	Role of business and economic factors
	Art and literary history
	Labor and social mobility history
Rulon	Political history
	Social history
	Institutions
	Local history

Phil Rulon is a well known Johnson Administration historian from Northern Arizona University. He emphasized political history, social history, and the understanding of institutions such as education and the church, as well as local history as key subject matter. His notion of what is important in history has changed over time. As to consensus among his fellow historians, Rulon saw very little, part of which he attributed to the competitive structure of the discipline, which promotes individual historians working on single

projects rather than larger joint enterprises that would produce more and better history. Disagreement is sought rather than agreement.

In the public schools there should be a logically sequenced curriculum, as suggested in Bruner's Process of Education. American history should be more research-oriented rather than relying so heavily on textbooks. Handling original documents and researching the why of things is more important. Rulon agrees with Bruner that anyone can learn anything with intellectual honesty at any level. He agrees with the general notion of cultural literacy, although he did not think it was a new idea, tracing it back to the University of Chicago in the 20's and 30's and its 100 great books that students had to pass a proficiency test on. The problem in a country of great ethnic and cultural diversity is what to choose to test for, and he would be opposed to a general culture test that everyone had to take. Nor did he have much confidence in the major standardized tests. Students should have a good understanding of the nature of democracy.

Even though he has edited two high school text books and has served on the Arizona textbook commission, Rulon's opinion of high school history texts was very low. "They are all middle of the road. They are all colorless. They are all washed out. They are all very repetitive. There is really no difference between the books." The reason for this is the process by which they are developed, which produces a traditional textbook, what Rulon called "gate keepers." With $1 million invested in the development of the book, marketing concerns predominate. Publishers are not going to offend Texans who want the Civil War taught in a particular way or any other

significant groups. This blandness is not the fault of the writers but rather of those who control the textbooks.

In Rulon's view geography is particularly underemphasized in the public schools. In the independent private high schools, which he surveyed a few years back, four years of history was required of everyone as part of the general background and as training for future leadership roles, as the British have done for some time. These prep schools also spend a great deal of time on writing essays and teach a style of life and a particular set of values. The classes are much smaller with an instructor having 50 students rather than 250 as in the public schools. Multiple choice tests are the exception rather than the rule.

Patty Limerick is an American History professor at C.U., whose specialty is the West. She is a recent addition to the faculty, having previously taught at Harvard. Dr. Limerick considers pluralism/diversity the most important key concept in American History.

> What matters the most to me is pluralism and diversity and along with that the capacity to see multiple points of view and recognize there are different ways to tell the same story and judge the outcome of the story. This includes cultural and ethnic diversity and the whole historiographic point of view. When that's not there, I know I get really frantic with students. However, it's not really their fault. I gather that high school teachers tell the students to be objective. They think they mustn't sympathize or have a twinge of empathy. That's not my professional opinion. You must empathize in many directions at once.

She considered political and governmental influences a second key concept.

> Many parts of history are shaped by the influences of the President and Congress; many parts are also shaped in defiance of these two. Political history must be seen in the context of its effects and lack of effects.

A third key concept was environmental history which she described as,

> Knowing where these people were living, what resources they were living off of and what long-term consequences are. How do innocent, well-intentioned acts of the past create the muddles of the environmental products we still have to live with? Based on a survey of college textbooks, I'd imagine it's not taken up. If it's not taken, we're getting further and further into a mess.

Another concept was labelled "private sphere history":

> If I were a different person, I'd say women's history, but I don't mean that; I mean private sphere history--the history of families and the history of children. These sorts of psychological and sociological aspects were utterly out of the curriculum when I was in high school.

The role of business and economic factors in shaping other factors was a fourth key concept.

> The means of production do pull on other factors and reorganize them like a magnet. So, economic history can dynamically be seen as shaping other sorts of spheres. I know this sounds a little Marxian.

After Limerick identified the above key concepts, she reflected on another idea.

> The one aspect I should be clearer on, but I'm not, is art and literary history. I'm sure it made me a better student on all levels, that I had read a lot. It would be better if cultural history stuff came with it, but I also don't want to take time away from other factors. I often require novels on the reading list; however, it would be nice to be able to refer more often to literary sources. We historians should be ashamed that we've let good writing become the terrain of novelists.

Limerick feels that stories and anecdotes help students realize that the people of the past were real, a fact that textbook formats don't always stress. She uses autobiographies, personal narratives, and diaries to help make the past come alive. Her sense of animation and humor have not always been appreciated by others in her field.

> I try to personalize. This is where I may part from other members of my profession. I don't write dreary history. But it's a battle. When I was in graduate school, I had my prospectus rejected because it was so humorously and casually written. My second book is due out in two weeks and is written in my voice. The publishers have been very receptive. Everything they tried to get me to change in graduate school is the reason I have trouble getting book contracts. So, I did reassert myself after my prospectus, but a lot of people get it whipped out of them in grad school.

She also seemed to sense that this same form of subtle coercion away from personal creativity towards a more structured approach was going on in the junior and senior highs.

> I am a state coordinator for History Day for junior high school students. I've judged papers, and my colleagues report that a

lot of projects bog down in nationalism and patriotic exercise. I have no problem with Patriotic Day, but if it's called History Day, then flag waving (and flag burning) is not the nature of the enterprise. But I'm afraid there's a gap between what we're doing, which I hope is free inquiry, which is not destructive nor wholly patriotic.

The other thing I see is some very talented students who've been given some goofy projects like writing about Baby Doe Tabor. You could do a broad survey of namelss women and that would reveal more of the past and society of the past. I wish we were talking more across borders to get out of "Baby Doe" studies.

Dr. Limerick had some further thoughts about what's being taught at the high school level.

What comes out of these studies is not pleasant--with pluralism and diversity; what people will do to each other in the process of negotiating through pluralism and diversity isn't always attractive. Can you talk about tragic human conflicts with people under 18? I don't know that constituency. Maybe you get in trouble with the school board or with vigilante parent groups. I'd be reluctant to ask a teacher to take a great risk unless we're all going to rally to that teacher's support. I can't see that any of these concepts are too sophisticated or complex to present. Not presenting them is a way to turn kids willfully stupid. All of the deadbeats should be challenged to give up their willful stupidity. I do it in my own classes.

Limerick evaluates her students on the basis of identification and essay exams and papers. Her students are encouraged to rewrite their papers and are rewarded for doing so.

My students ask, "What does it matter how I've said it as long as I know the material?" But I see this as inseparable. Clarity of expression and thinking is important. The policing comes from identification. Why is that worth learning? On essays the key thing I'm looking for is integration of particulars with

generalizations. I want an alarm to go off if generalizations are not grounded in example and evidence. If my students forget everything about Western American History, I hope they leave with the capacity to feel obligated to have evidence supporting conclusions and vice versa.

Dr. Limerick ended with thoughts about standardized testing.

I'm an institutionalized team player and part of me says I don't want to make concessions on standardized exams. That would be my basic stand. I'm not sure in my definition of an intelligent person where test taking stands. On the other hand, I'd really like my students to have a general fund of information so I can make a quick reference to something. It would be fun if I could rely on the storage of a whole bunch of facts. So, I'd like to have both contempt for standardized testing and admiration for students who'd done well. I'm afraid the hypocricy is central to this.

Fred Anderson is an assistant professor of history at CU where he teaches the required survey course in United States history. He speaks of the key concepts in history in terms of five major themes which provide a superstructure for particular events and conflicts.

It's easier for me to talk about stories and themes rather than concepts--but in some sense they mean the same thing. There are 5 enormous themes which dominate American history up to about 1865, and have influences well beyond.

When you define themes at this level, then the whole story becomes thoroughly integrated.

What is important is to caste these themes like a fugue - simple themes, a counterpoint theme, a second theme - the whole thing weaves together in a complex contrapuntal whole.

Themes on this level are so powerful narratively and so powerful analytically that it's possible to organize the little stories underneath them in such a way as to make sense of the whole thing.

The first theme is "Land vs. Labor". Anderson discusses the enormous imbalance between available land and available labor.

> In European institutions there was lots of cheap labor and little land, which was controlled by very few. All of the institutions were shaped by this fact. In the New World there was an enormous amount of land and almost no labor, and this leads to regimes in which you have to control labor --like inservitude in the South.

Anderson looks at the variety of responses to how to create a viable economy with this "upside-down labor/land situation." He sees this as a problem which persists in the New World and examines the different responses in different regions. Using this theme, Anderson castes the development of slavery in terms that are "one step back from the narrative itself."

His second theme is that "Ideas Matter." In other words, ideas have a life of their own which "allows them to get appropriated by groups and used for their own ends." The third theme is that war changes things out of all proportion to intent and "become out of control of those who initiate it." Fourth, there is "continuous inter-cultural contact along the margins of settlement." The last theme is the "progressive unification of American societies."

> You find innumerable tiny settlements in the 17th century that were quite separate from each other coalescing into, say, five regional societies by the middle of the 18th century - coalescing under the impact of war - which is an example of how things interact - into a single political state which is still strongly regionalized and then merged even further into two regional economies, North and South, and then finally coalescing a third time to create a single political nation in

> which there is some substantial unification of the national market as well as the national political system itself.

Anderson points out that there is certainly no consensus on these particular 5 themes, which are used in "a fugal way--continuous development and interaction." He finds this structure to be most helpful in unifying the larger story. "Otherwise it's a lot of detail - one damn thing after another."

In terms of the high school curriculum, Anderson believes that there is a need for students to know a certain amount of "dry factual stuff." But he thinks that students could know this in a connected way, in a "reasonably sophisticated way." He would not want either to project his course into high school texts nor to impose any particular conceptual model on their learning.

> The students coming into my class are surprisingly ignorant. Most students have a smaller fund of common knowledge that I expected them to.
>
> Many of them don't know that Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin--they can't even name an American 19th century author--and they should be aware that there was a Civil War from 1861 to 1865--and some of them don't know that.
>
> I spend a good deal of time scrambling to catch up--due to the massive ignorance.

Anderson believes that there are innumerable ways to teach history badly. "One of the ways is to suck all of the stories out of it so it is taught without any contingency or drama." As an example, he talks about the way the ratification of the Constitution is presented in textbooks. He doubts that it is made clear that ratification was by

a minority and that some of the delegates "got each other drunk before the vote in order to sway the vote." He emphasizes that people ought to understand what really happened and to "make heroes more accessible as human beings." That would include their misdeeds and misbehaviors to show that they were interesting human beings.

> You suck all the interest out of history if you diminish the humanity of people being looked at.

How does history fit into the social studies curriculum? Anderson has some real problems with teaching history as part of social studies.

> It tends to dilute the actual presentation of history as something which is its own discipline. It tends to get conflated with civics, economics, and god knows what else.
>
> History is a discipline of its own because it deals with time and change over time.
>
> It teaches students how to think in time and how to recognize change and ways that human actions are constrained and empowered by change over time and this has very little to do with what sociologists talk about or how they think and what good citizenship is.

Anderson sees value in looking at current issues as ones with a chronological component. But to "assume that the present will be of compelling interest to students and the past is just a background to it is just nonsense and deeply ahistorical and deeply condescending to those who have lived in the past." As an example, Anderson discusses the current problems of AIDS. He points out that AIDS is

not the first incurable venereal disease and that syphilis had a more highly significant impact. We might examine the history of human behavior in the face of syphilis as a guide to our future actions. Certainly the past helps us to understand the present better, but students should not believe that our problems are more consequential than those in the past.

What should all students know? They ought to understand that there were important facts or events that characterize certain periods in American history and within this, certain dates. They need to know the big changes in American society which include industrialization, how it relates to economics and culture. Anderson emphasized that students must be aware that things happened in order, and that dates are necessary to show this.

In discussing standardized tests and what should be included on them, Anderson reiterated his dismay at the lack of common knowledge.

> So I want facts. On the other hand, I don't think that the sum of facts is an adequate knowledge of history. In order to reason historically, you have to know a certain amount of 'stuff' but without the knowledge you can't use it productively.
>
> I don't give, nor will I ever give, if I have the choice, a multiple choice exam. I think they're wrong. They don't measure anything except the ability of people to memorize stuff and apply it in the short term and of course to guess adequately.
>
> I would stress the ability to put disparate facts together in an argumentative framework--they should have some familiartiy with argumentative prose.

Anderson was adamant in his belief that standardized tests measure skills which have little to do with historical understanding. He is interested in whether or not students are able to advance a thesis or make an argument that employs the historical evidence.

> History is a special kind of reasoning--based on the integration of a certain range of facts into argumentative structures that deals with specifically, change over time.
>
> It's a field in which students are compelled to reason and explain themselves to uninformed but intelligent readers. In the end, that's what history is good for.

Anderson does not believe that the important ideas in history can be captured in the multiple choice format. The Advanced Placement history exams that he has seen are "wrongheaded and test nothing." He offered his own example of a good question.

> The American colonies were diverse and heterogenous in 1750 but by 1776 they declared independence and by 1789 they had erected a large republic based upon a written constitution which was unprecedented in world history.
>
> How did this happen? How did they move from diversity to unity?

Social Studies Educators

The questions asked the three social studies educators in the interviews were somewhat different from the ones asked the disciplinarians. The educators were asked what the proper subject matter of social studies should be and what disciplines were key. They were prepared to list the major concepts in each of the social

science disciplines but were insistent that these concepts, data, and sequences of events are only the means to a rather different educational end. Although there was no agreement on what content all students need to know (if any at all), some familiarity with the origins of our democratic world would provide a context in which to view current social dissension, they thought.

In the view of the educators, the disciplines of history, political science, and economics should not be taught as separate entities for students to master and appreciate but instead the purpose should be to foster citizenship and effective participation in a democratic society. This civic funtion of social studies could take the form of actively engaging in social and political systems as well as developing skills necessary to function as discerning and participating citizens.

On the one hand, there is the teaching of the separate disciplines with their own structure and concepts and on the other, the function of social studies as socialization and the transmission of the cultural heritage. The educators insist that American society should be discussed honestly and critically by showing its weaknesses and failures as well as its successes and "to hold up the ideal." The mission of enculturation can lead to the glorification of our own system at the expense of global understanding and awareness, they feared.

What about appropriate testing and evaluation? The reactions ranged from a cautious optimism that tests can be constructed which assess critical thinking skills to total abhorrence of standardized tests. The educators would like to see more writing and analysis questions or else evaluation of the students' actual participation in

community activities. The dual role of social studies in the schools--the integrity of the disciplines vs. citizenship development--was apparent throughout these interiews.

The educators were somewhat ambivalent about the teaching of facts, believing that there may be certain things all students should know but that anything has value if taught well. One difference between the educators and the historians is that the educators believe one does not learn citizenship by reading history but rather by participating. Learning by doing occupies a more important place for the educators. Democracy and teaching for democratic citizenship is paramount for them.

Two of the educators emphasized the value of the American system as the best in the world, while at the same time lamenting the lack of critical thinking among students. The third saw social studies education as it is now practiced in the public schools as a highly romanticized and distorted view of American society and history serving to glorify the United States. In his vew the curriculum should focus on contemporary social issues as the basis for reflective thinking, issues such as race and minority relations, with an emphasis on rational dialogue. None of the educators sees current teaching in the schools as being very good or as producing critically thinking and reflective citizens. All advocate a focus on contempory conflicts and social issues.

They see the current curriculum as defined primarily by the textbook publishers, who are wary of a critical treatment of American history and society. Most social studies reform efforts of the 1960's to improve the content of the social studies failed, the

educators believe. All three are also strongly opposed to current standardized tests, which do not require analytic or reflective or critical thinking. Nor do the tests capture or reflect the important concepts of the social studies. The tests reflect the textbooks. One educator estimated the overlap between what experts think is important and what is actually tested at 10%. Another stressed that the real test of social studies education lies in ultimate student behavior, as reflected in pregnancy, suicide, employment, and political participation rates.

Social Studies Educators	Concepts
Kraft	Social problems--environment, war, peace
	Active citizenship
Haas	Contemporary social issues
	Thinking critically about society
Cousins	Power,compromise, efficiency, majority rule
	Historic change
	How to think

Richard Kraft is a faculty member in the School of Education at CU. His main interests include Social Foundations, Philosophy of Education, and Experiential Education. Kraft has served as a consultant and lecturer in many Latin American countries and has traveled extensively in all parts of the world. He has a broad perspective on international education and diverse forms of governments. Kraft is politically active and is currently serving a term on the Colorado State Board of Education. He has participated in partnerships with local school districts and is currently teaching in PROBE, a problem-based experiential teacher certification program.

Although Kraft was willing to outline the key concepts in social studies, discipline by discipline, the main focus of the interview was on his views of citizenship, political activity, and social change. He listed a few 'traditional areas' in the social sciences (distribution of wealth and goods, political decision making, resources, frontier thesis, constitutionalism, wars, etc.) but argued that Tyler's Eight Year Study showed that any curriculum has inherent value if taught well and that the critical factor is how an individual teacher or school

"delivers" the curriculum, whatever it is. It is possible that "every student should know the traditional facts but they have been so horrendously taught that it might be better not to have gone through the process."

In Kraft's opinion, all the disciplines are interrelated and therefore "the division of the curriculum into little components is unsatisfactory. Separate departments in the social sciences may make sense for schools but not for kids and society." He claims that the data are important only if they have relationship to some broader context, and he suggests an inter-disciplinary approach aimed at broad societal problems, such as peace, environment, nuclear war, etc. Although contemporary issues could make a good curricular focus, if designed well, there is also the fear that "if it is the sharing of massive ignorance with no factual base then it is a waste of time."

According to Kraft, the major disaster in American education is in the area of citizenship. An experiential and action approach is necessary. In particular, students need to become involved in economic and political systems at an early age. Doing social studies means participating in political and social activities, as well as researching ones own family and community histories. In order to implement these ideas on active participation to ensure good citizenship and an understanding of democratic society, major changes would have to take place in the educational system. Kraft would like to see students working in political campaigns, working for the homeless, and working as volunteers in homes for the aged. He emphasized his strong belief in learning by doing and feels that

"in the absence of this kind of action and concreteness, the theories just float aimlessly." Kraft was impressed with a number of projects from the 60s and early 70s which were somewhat effective but "disappeared without a ripple."

Kraft is unequivocal in his defense of teaching for American democracy. He paraphrases the American Federation of Teachers, which stated that "although we need to teach legitimately and honestly about other systems, democracy is the best system and we don't have to apologize for it or pretend that other systems are equivalent to our democratic heritage." He believes that students need to understand why other systems came into being but the longer he lives and works under other systems the more enthusiastic he is about our own. "The kids need to get wildly excited about a country which is made up of 99% immigrants, which has absorbed them and kept going."

Kraft thinks that every generation has to be renewed in the democratic tradition, in the ideals of the system. He is also in favor of "baring every piece of dirty linen in public as well as every piece of clean linen, of which there is a lot." Because this country is the oldest democracy in existence, he thinks it can obviously stand the critique. "Democracy is a fragile phenomenon, and in the last 20 years we seem to have abandoned our ideals because we couldn't reach them." He thinks that we haven't taught our children the lessons we learned in the 60's and and that is why we find racists and sexists among our college students. "The fraternity system doesn't know any better because what we have taught them is

pablum. The American history texts are so watered down to meet the lowest common denominator that they are nonsense."

> I'm enough of a Marxist to believe that critical thinking in the absence of action is irrelevant. Who gives a damn unless it changes your reality or the reality of those around you?

According to Kraft, the current teaching of social studies has failed, but not because of declining SAT scores. It has failed because of the alienation of youth, the high delinquency and suicide rates, low voter turnout, high unemployment, and the pregnancy rates of young people. These are the ultimate criteria for determining whether or not we have met our objectives in the area of social studies. Kraft does not see anything that is "true" that should be eliminated from the high school curriculum. The depth of the analysis of the material is obviously dependent upon the intellectual capabilities of the students. In other words, the ability of the students to deal with the issues has only to do with their cognitive development. He also says,

> I have publicly denounced standardized testing both at the state and local level and if I could abolish ETS I would.

The states should move towards accountability but of a different kind than that secured by the current standardized tests. In order to see if students have gotten the message of social studies, the states have to look at pregnancy, suicide, employment, expulsion rates along with ITBS scores. In order to assess individual student's mastery, Kraft would be interested in when the student last had a

discussion on a social or political issue, whether they are familiar with voter registration, what kind of public service they have performed, what campaigns they worked on, and which political party they would join. In short, social studies is successful when the students are active participants in the democratic process.

John Haas has been a professor of education at CU for many years. His areas of specialization include social foundations of education, methods in social studies education, international and comparative education, and future and global studies. Haas has just completed a year of participation in an experiential teacher training program designed for mature students holding a baccaleuriate degree.

Haas began by giving a comprehensive history of social studies education during the last 50 years. There was clearly a distinct division between his own views and those of the majority of social studies educators and an even greater disparity between what is currently taught in the schools and his own philosophy of social studies education. "In every society, socialization takes precedence over education." According to Haas, the dominant mainstream rationale for the social studies is "Conservative Cultural Continuity" or "Transmission of the Cultural Heritage." He sees social studies as "designed to socialize the young to the current status quo and to educate students via an extremely restricted and romanticized interpretation of history, politics, economics, etc. This rationale relies heavily on tradition in Western civilization and in American society; on history for selected facts and events that enhance the glory of the United States as the fulfillment and culmination of Western culture;

on political science to justify the superiority of American republican democracy; on political and economic geography to legitimize national destiny, imperialism, and the US economic system.

> The mainstream social studies curriculum is not designed to educate--its aim is socialization and enculturation. It reinforces the rituals and symbols of our society and tries to make students unthinking members of it.

Haas describes the social studies reform movement, which was led by social scientists, as an attempt to intellectualize the curriculum based on the structure of each discipline and on discovery learning. The reformers would eliminate consensus history in the driest and dullest form and "show the flavor and fervor of doing historical research." These reformers would show the political process as pure conflict resolution and concentrate on political behavior. They would teach modern aspects of geography (political, cultural, comparative), not merely the capitals of the states. The social scientists would emphasize the theories, concepts, laws, and research methodologies of each discipline with the inquiry approach as the mode of teaching. Haas contrasts these ideas with the mainstream approach, which is devoid of hypothesis formation, frame of reference, process, conflict, original documents, and discussion of bias and objectivity.

The reform movement led by social studies educators used contemporary social issues as the focus for reflective thinking. Examples might be race and minority group relations, courtship and marriage, religion and morality. This analysis of public controversy

concentrates on defining issues and disputes, using rational dialogue to clarify the controversies.

> History for pure indoctrination slights the best possible learning and best possible teaching.

Despite the attacks from these reform movements, the mainstream stays constant. There were some innovative approaches in the 1960s, probably as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam, and Haas gave examples of the new curricula which included the AEP booklets (Taking A Stand, Racism, Sexism, Vietnam) and the High School Geography Project. He believes that these reforms were not widespread because the curriculum was difficult to teach, expensive to produce, and flew in the face of mainstream political views.

> Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes sufficient to change the thoughts and actions of an individual; they are rarely if ever enough to sway organizations and institutions.

What should be taught in social studies at the secondary level? Haas believes that the content should be "contemporary, non-transient public issues" and the process should be "critical or reflective thinking and problem solving." Students should investigate the history, politics, and sociology of these issues in order to become effective thinkers and citizens. Haas notes that social studies goals and curricula are generally fashioned from a combination of national tradition, state and local guides (often contradictory), national textbooks, university faculty and

professional organization pronouncements, and the distillation of all of these and other influences by the teacher.

Haas sees the American public school as an organization best described as a form of "organized anarchy." That is, the "loose coupling" of the various institutional components makes it almost impossible to standardize and enforce any educational change. This loose coupling is the "bane of the reformers, the courts and school administrators, but is a saving grace for teachers and students."

> It is a futile gesture to legislate certain learning or certain teaching-unless, or course, non-compliance is penalized by jail or huge fines.
>
> Teaching is always a diffuse and emergent task, revealing a complexity that precludes precise specification or technical prescription.

Haas does not believe that current standardized tests capture the important concepts in social studies. In fact, he sees the overlap between expert opinion and what is actually tested for at about 10%. By and large, standardized tests get at the facts from current textbooks, and only a few questions require critical thinking. The tests that Haas thinks are worthwhile give students data to manipulate and ask them to make judgments about the data, indicating their degree of certainty and how they arrived at particular conclusions. The Watson-Glaser Test of Critical Thinking is an example of a good test.

Haas is very much against any form of standardization within the educational system, whether it be tests, curricula, or teaching practices. He believes that any effective reform or change will have

to take place at the local school or classroom level. Standardized tests, even though they match the current curriculum fairly well, can be safely ignored by good teachers and will not substantially effect school practices.

> No evidence has yet been produced--historical, philosophical, statistical or experimental--to demonstrate the superiority of any single pattern of social studies curriculum over any other patterns.

Jack Cousins has been a professor of education at CU for the last 20 years and will be retiring soon. His areas of expertise include secondary social studies education and social foundations of education. He has served as director of teacher certification and has supervised many secondary preservice social studies teachers. Cousins believes that the subject matter of social studies is drawn from the various disciplines of history, economics, sociology, and political science, including such concepts as power, compromise, efficacy, majority rule, consent of the governed, and the right of citizen participation. The only real concept in history is change; "history is the story of cultural change--the progress in time of a group of people". Cousins also sees methodological concepts like frame of reference, internal and external criticism, and primary/secondary source materials as important.

However, data and facts are not the end goal. "The disciplines provide the grist for thought." In other words, the real subject matter is learning how to think and face current controversial issues. Cousins stresses the use of the disciplines to encourage critical

thinking, to confront political questions and assumptions, to draw and test broad generalizations, and to assess conclusions by the empirical evidence. "We draw from literature, economics, and history to develop the thinking skills needed by the average citizen in society." In Cousins' opinion, there is a general consensus among social studies educators as to the nature of their field. They believe that the data and concepts of the social sciences are the means for the development of reflective thought and a context for explaining and examining current conflicts and policies.

Should the "truth" be taught to students at the high school level? Absolutely yes, according to Cousins. He sees the need for students to face the tragedies and mistakes of our past and has no desire to paint Americans as historically "glorious and pure." He wants students to be very critical of their own society (pariticularly in the area of minority mistreatment) and to recognize that our heroes were people with weaknesses. "We have to examine basic premises and practices and raise questions about improving American democracy." Although Cousins stresses the critical view, he holds strong beliefs about the values of the American system and the necessity of student awareness of these ideals. "In terms of the transmission of our culture, every society must perpetuate its own system every generation or it will fall apart. We have one of the highest value structures in the world and we need to hold that up. At the same time, we need to teach kids where we live--how far we are beneath it. Every generation should attempt to come closer to the realization of those values for all members of society."

All students should have a good understanding of the chronological development of American society. They should understand the theoretical framework of a democratic government, with emphasis on power. compromise, and change. Comparisons should be made between our political/social system and those of other countries. In addition, students should be aware of the global problems of lack of food, housing, and literacy.

Cousins notes that the curriculum for both junior and senior high students is determined by each individual school district in Colorado. Although state guidelines and objectives exist, they are often very general and vague. Social studies educators have some small influence by acting as consultants and editors to textbook publishing companies. The largest determiners of curriculum, however, are the major textbook publishers, who are often wary of a critical treatment of American history. Cousins uses Bruner's "Man - A Course of Study" to illustrate one attempt to divert the mainstream curriculum. The materials in this innovative treatment of social studies for junior high students is seldom used today as a result of the opposition of Jerry Falwell and the resulting loss of NSF funding.

Fortunately, the truly fine teachers can expand upon the mostly dry and tedious texts by including their own activities and materials. Cousins estimates the number of teachers whose treatment of social studies curriculum is consistent with his own philosophy at only 10%. His explanation for the low coincidence between the views of social studies educators (who teach the methods courses in teacher training programs) and what is actually taught in the classroom is the obligation of the teachers to adhere to

current textbooks, as well as the training of pre-service teachers in small and conservative colleges.

Cousins believes that standardized tests do not reflect the important concepts in social studies but they do match well with the current curriculum. Although he is not familiar with the tests that are presently being used, he recalls some previous items on the National Assessment of Educational Progress which test understanding as opposed to mere recital of facts and dates. He feels that in order to have a good standardized test the multiple choice items would have to be quite lengthy, the problems must require analysis, and all of the choices would need to be plausible. Although these tests would be time-consuming to test and to take, Cousins feels that it can be done.

High School Teachers

The teachers interviewed included three teachers of high school social studies and four history teachers, although most social studies teachers also taught some history. Like the scholars interviewed, these were people with reputations for being the best of their profession, not the average teacher. The concepts taught by these two teacher groups differed, as one might expect. The key concepts identified by the social studies teachers included change, technology, war, revolution, rebellion, formation of governments, community and social contracts, immigration and assimilation, justice and morality, colonization, freedom and slavery, rights and responsibilities, cultural diversity, efficacy, and global independence. Zola was interested n current issues, Nolan in immigration and

cultural diversity, and LaRue in revolution and national agression. Their interests reflected their disciplinary training.

All indicated that historical facts were not an end in themselves, and that the objective of social studies was to use data from the social sciences to foster the ability to analyze current controversies and to "develop the skills needed for a competent functioning citizen." Students were encouraged to participate in the democratic process, to be able to critique newspaper articles, to understand political and social issues, and to be able to find information on their own. In short, they were to be able to explore an issue independently and be able to write coherently on a subject. These teachers believed that human relations on a personal and societal level should be a key element of any social studies curriculum. They all agreed that the current textbooks are poorly written and non-conceptual, devoid of life and drama, contain few primary sources, and are mere chronology with no common themes or threads throughout history.

The teachers are fervent in their desire to maintain control of what is taught in the classroom. They are willing to accept the intrusion of broad objectives from outside but resent the standardization of specific curricular content. Their reactions to standardized tests range from indifference to strong animus, and unless the tests are tied to some sanction like graduation or merit pay, they would probably be ignored, say the teachers. The tests do not capture the skills that the teachers are trying to develop, and while admitting the need for some common information, the teachers are more interested in the students' ability to analyze and become

participating members of society. There is a blurring of the content of the separate disciplines with the more important goal of training for good citizenship.

The teachers who teach history mainly or exclusively are also concerned about teaching for citizenship and "thinking skills," perhaps emphasizing citizenship even more than the social studies teachers. Concepts like the frontier, foreign policy, and economic determinism are taught but primarily as a way of developing good citizens. These teachers too feel that the textbooks are inadequate and try to supplement them but seem to follow them more closely than the other group, often using test questions supplied by the publishers. The outcome of the high school history curriculum is seen as personal change on the part of the student rather than specific knowledge of content. As with all the other teachers, there was a condemnation of standardized tests. All in all, the teachers as a group expressed concern about citizenship, which they saw as a problem in contemporary American society.

Teachers	Concepts
Zola	Change and technology,
	Violence
	Participation, empowerment, and efficacy
	Rights, freedoms, and responsibilities
	Justice and morality
Nolan	Interdependence and scarcity
	Community
	Social contacts

	Decision making
	Cultural diversity
	Immigration and assimilation
	Nationhood
Larue	Colonization and slavery
	Formation of governments
	Basics of democracy
	Revolution vs. rebellion
	Freedom vs. slavery
	Reality of systems vs. theory of systems
	International conflict
	Money systems
Malmgren	Constitutions
	Government
	Responsibilities of citizenship
	Values
Nason	Citizenship
	Frontier
	Foreign policy
	Economics
Doyle and Sanger	Nationalism
	Government
	Freedoms
	Cultural diffusion

John Zola is a highly respected and popular social studies teacher at Fairview High School. He has taught the secondary social

studies methods course at CU and given a number of workshops and in-service seminars throughout the district. Zola has served on numerous curriculum committees and is active in professional organizations.

The key concepts in history and political science, according to Zola, are change, technology, violence, participation, empowerment, efficacy, rights and freedom, responsiblities, justice, morality and the idea that people can change institutions. The above concepts need to be addressed regardless of the particular historical events being discussed.

> A textbook structures you to stick to a set chronology and interpretation.
>
> Content in textbooks is stupid pablum but the bigger problem is that it forces you into one particular form of teaching.
>
> What really bothers me is the teachers whose entire planning consists of numbering worksheets and deciding on what day to assign readings in the text.

Zola is the only teacher in his department who does not use a textbook for US history. Although he takes a similar chronological approach to that of the text, he selects certain areas for more depth and analysis. "There is such a finite amount of time to do an infinite amount of stuff that I pick events that address key concepts that relate to current controversies or are common threads throughout history." He also chooses topics that he thinks will have some interest for the students as well as himself and those areas for which he has good materials. Zola uses activities and materials which lend

themselves to "thinking, debatin, and skill development." He has 19 bookcases of materials, books, folders of newspaper articles, and curriculum projects that he has collected over the years from seminars that he has either attended or given.

Zola actually teaches US history in the same way to junior high students as he does to those in senior high. He uses the same materials and activities but alters his expectations of their writing ability and analyses. There is no distinction made between college-bound and non-college bound students; in fact, his classes are totally heterogeneous. "Any kid who shows up and turns in their work will pass; I'll find a way."

Zola creates all his own tests. Most of them are essay tests, and he gives out the questions in advance. Many of the students will turn in rough drafts of their responses to be critiqued before the actual test. "My theory is that testing should not be a guessing game....I tell them the things I want them to know and give them the time to think about the questions." Only two objective multiple-choice tests are given each year, usually on the Constitution.

Zola admits that the down side of the way he teaches is that he doesn't prepare his students for standardized tests. Although the students may be better off as a result of the thinking skills they have developed, this doesn't help them get into prestigous colleges. "I know I am screwing them royally when it comes to those tests but I don't really feel guilty about it."

Zola points out that although he is a very strong "process" teacher he understands that you have to have something to process and there is some factual material that might be tested for. But he

would replace "current nonsense" with tests of thinking skills and multiple choice items that require analysis.

He feels that it is much more important to look at the kinds of skills necessary for a competent functioning citizen. The list of outcomes used in the Jefferson Open School might be used as a guide. These include asking a student to critique an article in a newspaper, identifying 5 sources of information they might use to find out the answer to a given question, writing a letter to a congressperson, and identifying the value conflicts in a given situation. Zola is clearly not impressed or intimidated by standardized tests. They do not affect his selection of materials or activities nor do they correspond well with what is emphasized in his classroom.

Theresa Nolan has a doctorate in education and a strong background in sociology and research methodology. Presently, she is teaching classes in American history, sociology, Asian studies and philosophy. Nolan is unique in the diversity of courses taught as well as her emphasis on original source material and her student participation in research and exploration. Because she created the curriculum for most of her classes, there is a high match between what she believes is important and what she actually teaches.

The important concepts in social studies are those that form the structure of othe various social science disciplines. Nolan mentioned interdependence and scarcity in economics; community, social contracts and political decision making in political science; global interdependence, cultural diversity, assimilation, immigration and nationhood in American history.

The American history course at Ranum High is unique in that it is divided into 4 sections (sociology, economics, political science, geography), and the same chronological content is discussed from these 4 points of view. This curricular organization does not match the chronological order of the text. Therefore, many teachers use the text as a resource and supplement it with original source material.

In her philosophy, Asian studies, and sociology courses Nolan uses mainly original sources. "All of the readings, (Kant, Old Testament, etc.) are run off for the students and I am always searching the newspapers for relevant surveys." She also uses research journals and popular magazines to augment primary source material. The flexibility in selecting content material is totally dependent upon the particular course. Nolan is part of a teaching team which collectively created the curriculum for the American history sequence. She has less flexibility in this course than in the philosophy and sociology courses she planned herself. "How I get the content across (process) is 100% mine all the time."

Nolan's doctoral thesis was a meta-analysis of ability grouping studies, and she came to the conclusion grouping does not increase the achievement of any of the students. Her classes, including the difficult philosophy class, are completely heterogenous, with students whose interests range from auto mechanics to college prep. "The same constructs are stressed for all students. After all, ALL students think, and I am not interested in remedial or intermediate thinking. I recognize that some students will give very concrete examples for

difficult and subtle questions, and many students will not make the leap to abstract thinking, but there is room for all of these students."

Nolan creates all of her own tests. The multiple choice tests in American history are constructed from question in the text as well as her own items and change from year to year because of the difference in students and content emphasis. Students in her elective classes are required to write short papers and take essay exams.

> The standardized tests are irrelevant to our curriculum. There is no match between the tests and what we teach.

Although the CTBS was being administrated to the students as this interview was taking place, few teachers were aware of the content of the tests and seemed fairly disinterested in the whole process. Ranum High School does not offer a course in World History, and the students can't answer questions on this subject. In addition, Nolan believes that the tests are often merely reading comprehension or "straight information" and are not trying to measure critical thinking skills.

> If the districts started to receive money based on the test results or our evaluations were based on them, then perhaps we would teach more to the tests. I would certainly evaluate them before making any changes.

Because Nolan believes that the tests are irrelevant, it would not be one of her priorities to become involved in the creation of standardized tests. "What I want to know is how my individual

students are doing based upon my curriculum and priorities. The standardized tests really measure less than what I think is important."

Bob LaRue is an experienced teacher at both the high school and junior high levels, currently teaching at Casey Junior High in Boulder. According to LaRue, the key concepts in social studies are "colonization, immigration, slavery, formation of governments, basics of democracy, revolution vs. rebellion, freedom vs. slavery, reality of systems vs. theory of systems, international conflict, money systems, origins of the Cold War, the nuclear world today and global interdependence."

LaRue does not think that the texts deal with "broader issues." They have no "conceptual framework--actually they are very trivial." He uses the textbooks only as resources for particular facts and occasionally for maps or time lines. To illustrate the difference between the way the texts treat an event and how it should be taught, LaRue uses the American revolution as an example. In the text particular battles and dates are emphasized, whereas he focuses on the distinction between "changing governments and changing regimes." He investigates who actually participated in the revolution and their degree of commitment, relating many other issues and stories surrounding this event.

When asked about the flexibility in deciding the curricular content of his courses, LaRue describes the district curriculum guides, which he thinks are "too general to have any real meaning." Within the very "vague structure of these guides, I have almost complete freedom." He believes "there are very few specific facts that

everyone ought to know, but there are a whole lot of students learning how to deal effectively with "incompetents, ingrates and aggressive people, on a political as well as personal level." In fact, "human relations should be the main focus of social studies...and I would include the research skills necessary to make the processes work." He remarks that college professors have no justification for requiring all these specific facts, "...it's just self-aggrandizement."

LaRue constructs his own tests, and they are almost completely essay exams. Occasionally he includes a "few matching questions in order to test for mastery of some new vocabulary." When describing the textbook tests (those included in the teacher's edition), he says that they "are simply awful--they're 'trivia bowls' which don't come close to testing the main concepts--there just has not been enough time spent on creating these tests."

Do standardized tests influence what he teaches? "Unfortunately, it does to some extent influence what I teach. I spend a little more time on names and dates....Kids who have gone through several years of process-oriented education suffer on the SATs." And for Advanced Placement History, "To do it honestly for the kids, it has to be pointed toward the exam."

LaRue is familiar with standardized tests since he spent a week-end writing questions for the National Assessment in US History (given in the fall 1987 to students in the 3rd, 7th, and 11th grade) and as a history teacher at Fairview High coached many students for the AP history exam. In writing multiple choice test items, LaRue spent a lot of time learning about good distractors and how to write questions that test for concepts. But he thinks that

overall the test have "heavy trivia content--lots of names and dates--sequences of events which are not critical sequences."

LaRue was adamant about not substantially altering his teaching to conform to these tests. "I would alter my teaching by moving to another country." And again, "If my department or district required that I turn in daily lesson plans or conform to their precise sequence of things, I would definitely not teach in their district." However, if merit pay were based on the student's performance on thest tests, then "that's a problem--I really don't know." How then can you test for the important ideas? LaRue is convinced that "students have to write a lot, and you have to pay people a lot to read it."

Dick Malmgren currently teaches US and World History at Fairview High School. He believes that the key concepts in US History include,

> An understanding of the Constitutions and government; the role we as citizens play in the story of US history; the influence we have in current government decisions; the responsibility we have of maintaining that citizenship in this country.

In world studies,

> I'm working more towards an understanding of the different cultures in the world. We as citizens in the US need to not be so arrogant that we are the best in everything and understand that there are values in all cultures and nations. The more we understand about each of those nations the better will be able to get along in the world.

Values were defined as,

> Those thoughts, those ideas that we hold dear, that we believe in, that guide our lives, that guide our interpretation of different concepts.

The text used for US history matches closely with the content Malmgren teaches. "The text is biased in a positive tradition toward the US, when not all recent history has been positive." The World History text doesn't follow as closely the content taught at Fairview and needs to be expanded upon. "We're relying a great deal on current videos and newspapers, as well as an overall understanding of those countries."

There is a great deal of flexibility in the History Department at Fairview concerning what is taught. The US History teachers have jointly constructed goals which all follow. "We have a great deal of flexibility in how we reach those goals and there are many paths to the outcome." There seems to be even more diversity among the World History teachers. "We all believe in the same basic goals, but we have very diversified methods and means." One frustration he has felt as a new member of the department is the lack of sharing. "I don't think we have good sharing in our department. As a new person coming back, I don't want to be asking everyday. It's not a real open department."

The broader framework for deciding what to teach comes from the school district curriculum guides,

> The main priority as far as what is taught is what the district curriculum says about the course. That's the number one priority. Our district curriculum is so broad that we have a lot of latitude beyond those general concepts.

Thus in reality, teachers are free to choose areas of emphasis. Malmgren's areas of emphasis are based not only on school district and departmental guidelines, but on personal choice:

> I will emphasize Constitution, responsibilities of citizenship in US history. I'm not sure there's anything I emphasize, unless it's understanding in World Studies. I am trying to teach thinking skills as opposed to facts. I'm hoping that students are trying to bring together some background to apply toward an understanding of current issues. In particular, I'm concerned that students at the secondary level and the young adults in our population have not accepted the responsibililty of voting, participation. It seems as though there's a general attitude, "I'm only one person, what could I do?" We have that responsibility to vote; we have that voice. We should appreciate having the opportunities we have. My observation is that we don't appreciate those.

Seventy-five percent of the student body at Fairview go to college, and this is reflected in the teaching approaches at the school. He feels there are different constructs used for college versus non-college bound students.

> I have a personal bias that we probably push too much toward the college-bound, and we fail to recognize that there's value in non-college experiences. In a required course there's a basic education that's responsible for everyone to accept and work toward achievement. If we're looking more toward separating college versus non-college bound students, then we have a responsibility to direct college-bound towards advanced placement.

Malmgren views tests as a means to evaluate what has been taught and how well-directed the students' study has been. His desire to mesh thinking skills with facts is reflected in his test

design. He uses multiple choice questions from publishers' tests and writes at least two essay questions "in order to develop thinking skills." He views the achievement level on his tests as an evaluation of the quantity and quality of study preparation.

> I find that after about a quarter, you can figure out which students are going to study for an exam and which ones are going to rely on what they've learned in class. I hope I'm challenging students to go beyond what's happening in the classroom. He also does an item analysis of each test question.

He had some interesting remarks to offer about the design and implementation of hypothetical local and state standardized tests:

> I'd like to insure that we're not becoming too localized, not trying to create a test of what I'm doing in the classroom, but what's the accepted achievement levels, goals, standards, expectations for the total field and discipline? That we recognize that even though we have a very affluent white population, these kinds of tests also need to recognize minority viewpoints as well. Maybe an impossible task, expectation.

Henry Nason teaches US History and Human Relations at Fairview High School. He is retiring at the end of this year after thirty years of teaching. Henry believes that the most important concept in US History is citizenship and defines it as,

> How we get to be the way we are as a country. Since we have a large role in the world we live in, kids need to understand how we got that way, and if they don't understand that, they don't have a good concept of their citizenship.

Three other concepts which Nason emphasizes are the ideas of the frontier, foreign policy considerations, and economics.

> I'm almost an economic determinist. I think much of what we do is based on our need to make a living. Economic issues are significant and kids are able to understand them very well. I have some natural interest in international relations and have long been interested in foreign policy. However, I'm not a big one to fight wars.

Perhaps part of Henry's interest in international affairs and human relations is based on a deep concern expressed during a conversation about creative teaching:

> Creative teaching has to do with knowing where someone is at any particular time. Where kids were twenty years ago is not where kids are today, for instance. You create based on the needs of people, which is particularly crucial right now.
>
> The thing I see happening in this country is that people don't trust anyone. This feeds into our relations with people in the world. We're not willing to take a chance. In the past the US has taken a chance on letting all kinds of people come into our country and it's made such a great, diverse society. Now we're saying "let's keep them out."
>
> Kids now can't trust administrators, teachers, adults. It's a real sad state of affairs that we're bringing up a generation who basically have the idea that people can't be trusted.

Nason works on trust building exercises through small groups and open discussion forums in his classroom. He is free to do this because "I have almost absolute flexibility. There's a curriculum of sorts, but we're not required to follow it. The only requirement

within the department is to cover a certain amount of material by a certain time."

He expressed some frustration at the dearth of materials on hand at his school, which limits his students' ability to expand in specialized areas. He uses films, movies, and the news media while teaching, but relies pretty much on his own notes. He feels there is little fit between the textbook his classes use and the curriculum he teaches. "I have never found an adequate textbook, nor do I know anyone who has. You always have to supplement."

Although Nason may think that the textbook is inadequate, he admits that he relies heavily on the publisher's tests accompanying the textbook and gives them almost exclusively.

> Yeah, I use them somewhat as a crutch. Generally, they're good test questions. They've spent more time looking at the information, and the questions are better than I could construct when I'm doing so many other things.

He is aware of the content of these tests when he teaches and even gives study guides which contain exact questions. Even though he uses tests as one means to evaluate his students, Henry is aware of the discrepancy between his own feelings of success and those of his students, as reflected in test scores:

> They don't say anything about my own success. I'd hate to justify what I've taught based on test scores. Good test scores show me that a student knows how to take tests well and that they know how to memorize. Two days later the information can be lost. The students, however, are hung up on grades. They feel down about low grades. They've been programmed

> to think success is an A or B. There are unreasonably high expectations in this school which stem from the school.

Although seventy percent of the student body at Fairview is college bound, Nason does not sense that there are different constructs appropriate for college vs. non-college bound students. Fairview does offer AP history classes and basic US history classes for slow readers. In order to truly evaluate students, Henry feels there needs to be fewer than his current thirty students per class. You will find out from the more verbal students what concepts have been learned but there must be other ways of getting at what kids have learned. Writing is so good for that, but you can't grade significantly. Time is a burden for teaching skills.

He emphatically does not believe that local or state standardized tests would help in the evaluation process. When asked what input he would like to have in any such implementation, he said, "I'd tell them where to go and how fast to get there. There is no purpose for giving district-wide tests."

Henry was quite philosophical when describing his "ideal test" for social studies:

> Let's look at how you live. If you can justify that you're socially aware, and you are mankind sensitive and you are willing to take some risks to make the world a different kind of place, then you've become the kind of person who's learned a lot about social studies. If you don't come out of social studies with a changed perspective of the kind of world we live in and how it should be and how you relate to all of than, then you haven't learned very much.

Henry ended his comments with this observation: "Any educational situation calls for self changes. You should not be the same person coming out that you were when you began."

Hershel Doyle teaches US History at Centaurus High School, and is currently department chair. He has been teaching for twenty years. *Jerry Sanger* teaches US History and World Studies at Centaurus and is a coach in a junior high. He too has been teaching for almost twenty years. They were interviewed jointly.

According to Doyle, the key concepts in U.S. History are the development of nationalism and the evaluation of government and freedoms as it relates to the US. Sanger felt that a key concept is culture diffusion, comparing foreign values and expectations with American values. Doyle thought that some texts matched well with what is taught, but that there was often a problem with selection. Since texts are adopted for a seven-year period, it's not possible to change midstream, even if course offerings change. Both said that most teachers supplemented the texts a lot.

The school district issues general guidelines which are conceptual in nature, so that teachers have flexibility about what is taught in the classroom. Although they consider the district guidelines when developing curricula, both said that teachers generally emphasize historical areas of particular interest to them. Hershel stresses the New Deal and Jerry stresses US-Soviet relations. Both thought that the constructs at Centaurus were taught universally to both college and non-college bound students, but that the students seemed to separate themselves out. The mid-to -ower range students, generally non-college bound, tended not to do as

well. The challenge, of course, was to stimulate all level students. Only 30% of Centaurus students are college-bound at the end of their senior year.

Both men prefer to construct their own tests, but are aware of the tests accompanying their textbooks. Once in a while, Sanger gives some of these exams and uses them as " a standard" from which to evaluate his students. Both men are hesitant to teach towards standardized tests. Performance on exams is only one portion of evaluation. There are enough other exercises and class projects to act as a "safety net" to balance out exam grades. If local standardized tests were implemented, both would like to have input, as would most teachers. They would not like to have "experts" determine test content. Sanger expressed ambivalence about the need to extablish some standard, as opposed to imiplementing standardized exams. He recommended establishing a departmental exam at the end of the junior year after all the state requirements are met and would like to see the senior year as a year for enrichment or remediation.

CONCLUSIONS

The ultimate purpose of the conceptual content assessment project is to investigate what content should be tested for on national standardized tests and how that content should be defined. The first phase of the project was to select a specific content area, in this case social studies, one of the subject areas most closely aligned with the

cultural literacy notion, and to investigate on a small scale what the key concepts were in that area, according to political scientists, historians, social studies educators, and teachers.

To that end we interviewed 3 historians, 3 political scientists, 3 social studies educators, and 7 high school social studies and history teachers as to what they think the key concepts are in their respective areas and what they think should be taught in the public high schools. Are there are important differences as to what disciplinarians, social studies educators, and high school teachers think are important concepts? What are the "key ideas" of the disciplines as conceived by these various groups? Certainly no claim can be made that this sample is representative of a national population, but if no consensus about key concepts exists among a few scholars and teachers from the same region, the chances of a consensus among a national population seem remote. Hence, we claim that this study is exploratory but suggestive nonetheless, the ultimate goal being to recommend how content in a loosely defined area like the social studies should be defined for purposes of testing.

The first question is the degree to which there is consensus within the various groups. We interviewed the political scientists primarily with regard to American government, and there seemed to be a considerable amount of consensus among them as to key concepts like democracy, separation of powers, etc. There was disagreement on some other issues, such as the degree to which political science should be normative or empirical, and on certain more specific concepts. Even with these disagreements it would not seem difficult to construct a domain of concepts regarding American

government that at least these three scholars would agree upon as important, even though they might take different sides of certain issues.

Consensus among the historians was far less, not so much because the historians disagreed directly with one another but because it was less clear in history what a key concept was, these scholars defining it as a story or theme about a particular period of time and place or as a particular era, such as history of the West or the Reconstruction. The three historians expressed different interests in different periods of American history. It is as if there is a fairly amorphous mass of historical material which can be organized or structured or cut in any number of different ways. History seems far less structured in terms of key concepts than does political science.

Among the social studies educators there is a considerable consensus, more so even than among the political scientists. This consensus does not focus on what the key ideas are so much as what should be taught, the attention of the educators shifting away from content towards the development of students' thinking skills and behavior. All three educators agree that the development of critical thinking skills in the social sciences is paramount for students and that this development can occur with different subject matter, so that no particular content is critical for students to know. The educators thought that good social studies should be reflected ultilmately in proper citizenship behaviors and that good citizenship was the ultimate goal. The social studies educators also felt that students should become socially critical regarding their own society,

and that this was not being done in the high schools today. At least two of the educators also held the belief that the American system was the best social system in the world, even though it might be improved upon.

The high school teachers were even more concerned about teaching good citizenship than were the social studies educators but they had diverse ideas about how to do this. What they taught seemed to reflect their own training and background, with the social studies teachers (who also taught history) often having a background in social sciences like sociology or anthropology, and teaching concepts that had a social science ring to them, like social change, technology, or money systems, though of course these concepts can be taught in history too.

Those who taught history primarily focused on concepts like the Consitituition, the frontier thesis, or government. They seemed to follow the textbooks more closely and perhaps to teach chronologically, though this is not certain. There is not a great deal of consensus among the social studies teachers in terms of basic concepts, except that developing critical thinking and citizenship skills was critical. The history teachers also emphasized citizenship, and there was more consensus on basic concepts, perhaps because the textbook was more central.

The second mode of analysis was to examine agreement across the various groups. The most consensus across groups focused on the concepts of American government, about which most everyone seemed to agree, whether teacher, educator, or disciplinarian. Ideas such as the separation of powers, democratic theory, and the

Constitution were not always expressed or advocated in the same fashion, but it seemed everyone was emphasizing the same things, though they might disagree on an issue such as whether the Executive branch is too powerful.

There also was strong agreement among all the groups that one should not teach facts alone or primarily. Among the disciplinarians facts were supposed to fit into larger concepts or frameworks of ideas or stories, and among the teachers and educators were supposed to further the ends of good citizenship and critical social thought. Some thought that there were certain facts that students should know but no one thought this was an end in and of itself but only a means to a greater good, such as enhanced understanding or better citizenship. That is not to say that there might not have been dismay if we had presented them with facts that students do not know. A few of the disciplinarians did express concern that students no longer had a fund of common knowledge.

The greatest areas of consensus across all these groups was not in the concepts each thought important but in their beliefs about tests and textbooks. Everyone thought that standardized tests were absolutely the wrong way to evaluate student knowledge because they did not capture what was really important. This criticism was usually directed towards multiple choice tests as a format with everyone strongly advocating essay exams, both at the college and high school level. At the same time most admitted to using multiple choice tests at one time or another in their teaching, usually because of the number of students. So there was both universal criticism and

widespread use of standardized, multiple choice tests. The criticisms focused on both the content of the tests and the format.

The greatest consensus among all groups on anything, however, was the disdain displayed towards high school textbooks in the social studies, especially history. Virtually everyone thought that high school texts were dull, distorted, avoided controversial issues, and were generally inadequate. This was expressed by even those who had worked on or edited high school texts. Some disliked standardized tests because they thought the tests reflected the textbooks. Most thought the texts were tailored to specific buyers, such as the state of Texas, and hence sanitized history and avoided controversial issues so as not to alienate anyone and lower sales. The result was a bland pablum without interest, as well as a distorted view of American history. It was difficult to find anyone to say anything good about the texts, which most believed were controlled by commercial publishers. Two reactions to this state of affairs was to supplement the textbooks where possible and to use more original historical documents in class.

Here then are the conclusions about the content of social studies testing based upon the findings from this phase of the project, keeping in mind the limitations of this small study:

1-There is enough consensus in the area of American government among political scientists for there to be a set of key concepts defined, even though the scholars might disagree among themselves about different sides of issues and whether political science should be normative or empirical.

2-Achieving consensus on the key ideas in history is problematic. The historians themselves did not see much consensus, and in fact it is not entirely clear what a concept in history really is. Is it a story, a theme, a moral? The historians did not so much disagree with one another as simply see a different era, event, or way of looking at history as being important. This is compounded by the fact that the historians strongly believe that history teaches moral lessons and values. One suspects that each historian may have somewhat different morals in mind, though we did not pursue this. It is not clear how consensus as to what concepts to teach and test for could be achieved. Possibly historians might agree that students should know certain facts, although all stressed that facts by themselves are meaningless.

3-No one, not the political scientists, the historians, the social studies educators, nor the high school teachers, thought that facts should be taught for their own sake. All thought that facts should serve some higher purpose, such as fitting into larger conceptual frameworks or employed in critical thinking or used in the exercise of good citizenship. Most agreed that there are certain things students should know but it seems unlikely that tests based solely on factual knowledge could ever satisfy any of these experts.

4-Critical thinking and good citizenship, loosely defined, were higher goals for most of these people, especially the social studies educators, who stressed the thinking skills more than content, some claiming that critical thinking could be developed with any subject matter. More practical skills, such as reading newpapers critically, were endorsed more by the educators and teachers than by the

disciplinarians. To oversimplify somewhat, skills meant more to the educators and teachers, and content meant more to the disiciplinarians. There was agreement, however, that appropriate testing should assess critical thinking ability. In general, the social studies educators also stressed developing a critical attitude towards contemporary American society, or at least mentioned this more frequently than did the other groups.

5-Standardized, multiple-choice tests were disdained by everyone as being inadequate both in format and in content. Standardized tests were believed to be useful only for informing outside authorities, such as state school boards, and had no relevance to teaching. Partly this is because these tests do not demand the types of skills necessary for critical thinking and reflection. And partly it is because such testing shifted the locus of control of the curriculum away from the classroom and the "frontline." Essay tests were greatly preferred and thought to be necessary to successful assessment in this area. On the other hand, many often used multiple choice tests themselves because of large numbers of students. Nonetheless, some form of essay test is greatly preferred as a method of assessing student learning.

6-High school textbooks are also greatly disdained, even more so than standardized tests perhaps, almost everyone believing the texts to be dull, inaccurate, and distorted. The textbooks also are seen as being totally within the control of commercial publishers and out of control of any of the experts. Basing test content on the textbooks does not seem to be a very good idea.

7-The ultimate conclusion of this phase of the study is that defining the content of tests in the social studies seems to be highly problematic. In some areas, such as American government, one might rely upon some consensus in the field as to what the most important concepts are. In history this seems less possible, unless one postulates that there are certain facts that students should know regardless of key themes and ideas. There is also agreement that critical thinking is important and that multiple choice tests do not capture this dimension. Essay tests are necessary. Textbooks themselves are so bad as to disqualify themselves as the source of content for testing. Hence, what should be the basis for defining the content of tests in the social studies, assuming that such tests will be given? We will explore other possibilties and approaches in the latter phases of this project.

APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

Introduction--We are conducting a study on content assessment which is trying to determine what content should be tested for in social studies at the high school level. First, we think it is important to ascertain what the key ideas and concepts are in the social science disciplines themselves and then to look at the fit between this content and what is being taught and tested for.

1. In your opinion, what are the key concepts/content in the discipline of history (political science)? [Probe until he/she lists five or so broad key ideas, concepts, constructs, e.g. "conflict, "democracy".]
   Could you elaborate a little on what ____ means? [Probe until we have a good idea of what the interviewee is talking about.]

2. Is there a consensus in your field as to what the key concepts/ideas are? Should there be a consensus?
   a. Are there concepts that should be given more weight than others? Are there some that should be de-emphasized?
   b. Is there general agreement/disagreement among your colleagues as to which concepts should be stressed at the college level?

3. Should these key concepts be taught in high school? In the same or different form?

4. What should be taught in high school instead of or in addition to the key concepts? (Probe at length here if this is very different from the key concepts?)

5. What content do you regard as absolutely critical to the teaching of history (political science)?

6. What do you think high school students should know about American history (government) in particular?

7. What content should be tested for at the high school level?

   a. What type of test do you feel would most accurately assess the knowledge acquired in the high school years?

   b. Have you ever written or evaluated a high school text?

B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS

1. What is the subject matter of social studies? What are the key concepts?

   What disciplines (history, geography, political science, economics,sociology) are the most important? Are/should they be integrated?

   What is meant by citizenship? What part does this play in the social studies curriculum?

2. Is there a consensus among social studies educators as to the nature of the curriculum?

   What changes in what is viewed as the essential concepts have occurred in the last 10 years?

3. What should be taught in social studies at the secondary school level to <u>all</u> students?

   How much should the schools function as a vehicle for transmission of the values and traditions of our society?

   How much should/are we promoting the American political system as the ideal?

   How much emphasis should be placed on contemporary social issues or problems?

   Should critical thinking, decision making, problem solving be part of the curriculum? Where do they fit?

   Is there or should there be a difference between the important concepts in the social science disciplines and what is taught at the high school level? What is/should be left out or added?

   Are key concepts identified by the disciplinarians? educators? school districts?

4. Do current standardized tests capture what you believe are the important concepts in the social studies?

   Do tests match well with the current curriculum?

   What experience have you had in the construction or use of standardized tests?

   Ideally, how should the students be tested (format, content) to maximize the relationship between what is mportant and what is tested for?

C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

1. What are the key concepts in your subject area?

2. How well do textbooks match the content of what you teach?

3. How much flexibility do you have over what is taught in the classroom?

4. On what basis do you make decisions regarding what is taught in your classroom?

5. Are different constructs stressed for college vs. non-college bound students?

6. What other kinds of instructional material do you use?

7. When administering tests, do you prefer to construct your own tests or do you use tests that accompany the textbook?

8. While teaching, are you aware of the content on standardized tests? Do you feel pressure to design your curriculum to reflect the content reflected on standardized tests?

9. How do test scores (standardized/non-standardized) reflect on your feelings of success; on those of your students?

10. If state/local standardized were to be implemented, what kind of input would you like to have?

11. Ideally, how would one test for the important ideas in social studies?

D. INTERVIEWEES

POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

Walter Stone, University of Colorado
Conrad McBride, University of Colorado
Larry Dodd, University of Colorado

HISTORIANS

Fred Anderson, University of Colorado
Patti Limerick, University of Colorado
Phil Rulon, Northern Arizona University

SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

Theresa Nolan, Ranum High School, Denver, CO
John Zola, Fairview High School, Boulder, CO
Richard Malmgren, Fairview High School, Boulder, CO
Hershel Doyle, Centaurus High School, Layfayette, CO
Jerry Sanger, Centaurus High School, Layfayette, CO
Henry Nason, Fairview High School, Boulder, CO
Robert La Rue, Casey Junior High, Boulder, CO

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS

Richard Kraft, University of Colorado
John Haas, University of Colorado
Jack Cousins, University of Colorado

E. PROJECT STAFF

Ernest R. House, Director, Lab for Policy Studies, University of Colorado

Carol Emmer, Lab for Policy Studies, University of Colorado

Patti Klaich, Lab for Policy Studies, University of Colorado

Elaine Kolitch, Lab for Policy Studies, University of Colorado

Barbara Waitz, Lab for Policy Studies, University of Colorado

Beverly Bushey, Student Volunteer, University of Colorado